

Remarks on the Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative

July 8, 1996

Thank you very much. Joseph and Tina Chery, your son must have been a remarkable young man to inspire such devotion and vision, and we thank you. We thank you for your work, and we thank you for your courage and heart in being here today. And we thank you, too, ma'am. Thank you very much.

Mr. Vice President, Secretary Rubin, Attorney General Reno, Under Secretary Kelly, thank you all for your good work. Senator Robb, thank you for being here today, sir, and for your leadership.

I thank the police chiefs, the prosecutors, the public officials from all across America who are here today, who know better than anyone that we will never be able to protect our children from violence or take our streets back for them and away from guns and drugs and gangs unless we all work together, as Mr. Chery said.

In the State of the Union Address I challenged our Nation to focus on this issue of youth violence. It is a supreme irony that we are living in an age of greater possibility for young people to live out their dreams than at any point in our history, but we are moving into the 21st century with youth violence on the rise, with too many of our children killing children, and too many others raising themselves on the street, and too many others simply vulnerable because they're going about their lives and they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time because we permitted those wrong places to develop and we permit them to continue to exist.

I'll never forget the young man I met in Long Beach, California, who was in a junior high school. He told me that his school had developed a school uniform policy because of the gangs in his neighborhood. And they figured if they all wore green clothes to school every day nobody would shoot them. And he said it was the first time in 3 years he'd gotten to walk to and from school without having to look over his shoulder.

There is no future for these young people unless we move to take it back for them. As the Vice President said, we have worked very hard with many of you and others to place

a comprehensive strategy to take back our streets from guns and gangs and violence and drugs. Many of you have been a part of it; we thank you for that. And the strategy is beginning to work. We believe this will be the 4th year in a row when the crime rate will go down.

But we all know there is still way too much crime in America, and we know that while crime is going down in the country as a whole, youth violence is going up. While drug use has been going down and cocaine use has dropped dramatically, casual drug use by young people is going up. So we have to do more to focus our strategy on youth violence.

That's why we strengthened the safe and drug-free school law, why we instituted a policy of zero tolerance for guns in schools, why we're now encouraging communities more strongly than ever to enforce their truancy laws and to take steps ranging from school uniforms to community curfews.

The drug strategy announced this spring by General McCaffrey focuses on young people. We are mounting a nationwide crackdown on gangs. And this spring I sent to the Congress legislation to make it easier to prosecute gangs. This January in the State of the Union Address I said that if a teenager commits a crime as an adult, he should be prosecuted as an adult, and that is a proposition that is gaining wider and wider agreement.

But as we take on this problem of youth violence, if we're serious about it we cannot avoid dealing with one of its most terrifying elements, teens with guns. This is an amazing fact; listen to this. The number of teenagers committing crimes without guns is the same today as it was in the 1970's, two decades ago. Let me say that again. The number of teenagers in the United States today committing crimes without guns is the same today as it was 20 years ago. The number of homicides by teens who have guns has tripled.

Today, if a gang member is caught committing a crime with a smoking gun in his hand, often as not, the gun is simply put in a police locker with little further investigation. Yet we know that gangs often buy in bulk from a single, shadowy supplier, a criminal network that channels an arsenal of weapons to young criminals or would-be criminals.

We need a national campaign to cut off the flow of guns to teens who commit crimes. Today I am directing the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Justice to work with local law enforcement in a new nationwide initiative.

In the 17 cities already mentioned, we will, for the first time, see that every time a gun is used in a crime and seized by law enforcement, it will be tracked through a national tracing system to find out where it came from. We will use that information to target those criminal gunrunning networks that are peddling guns to our teenagers.

Local and national prosecutors have agreed to work together to break up these criminal gangs. And the new data from these 17 cities will give us a much better idea of how the black market in guns actually operates and how to break it. Police on the beat, prosecutors in the courtroom, Federal investigators in the crime lab, they'll all work together in a genuine national team to take on the gunrunners.

Those who illegally peddle guns to our children will get a simple message: We will find you, we will prosecute you, and we will punish you. We owe that much to fine families like the Cherys, to the children they lost and the children they still have to give to this world and to our future.

We have to give the future back to all of our children. We cannot permit the United States to go into the 21st century the richest, the most powerful country in the world, with more opportunities available to more young people to live out their dreams than ever before, and keep allowing our young people to die before their dreams ever have a chance to take shape.

I thank the law enforcement personnel who are here and those who stand with you all across America. I thank the members of the administration who have worked on this. Most important, I thank the Cherys and all the families who have known the most unimaginable loss any human beings can know, for having the courage to stand with us and demand that we do better.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks,

he referred to Joseph and Tina Chery, whose son was killed in gang crossfire in 1993.

Memorandum on the Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative

July 8, 1996

Memorandum for the Secretary of the Treasury, the Attorney General

Subject: Implementation of the Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative

Firearms violence is a scourge on our society. Homicides committed by young people with firearms have nearly tripled since 1985, and other types of gun-related violence have been on the rise. Too many guns are in the hands of our Nation's children.

Through the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act and the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, we have reduced criminals' access to firearms, including military-style assault weapons. We are using the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 to take guns out of schools, making schools a safer learning environment for our children.

In addition, working in cooperation with State and local law enforcement in unprecedented fashion, Federal investigators and prosecutors have successfully disrupted numerous illicit gun markets across the country over the last 3 years. We need to strengthen our efforts to clamp down on these illegal markets, especially those that provide crime guns to children.

The Department of the Treasury's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) has developed a pilot program that will trace all guns used in crime that are seized by Federal, State, and local law enforcement officers, and work with that trace information to help identify illegal gun traffickers. The project utilizes an innovative computer software system that examines crime gun trace information and provides law enforcement officers with crucial investigative leads about the sources of these guns. By analyzing patterns of gun trafficking that exist in an area, we are developing more effective law enforcement strategies to target illegal gun traffickers for prosecution, particularly those